

## **Virtual Research Center (VRC)**

### **An Overview**

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The Virtual Research Center (VRC) is a World Wide Web (WWW) based online project management information system. Tools within the VRC include a document manager, an action item tracker, a calendar, a team directory, a threaded discussion tool and an activity log. Each team using the VRC has a password protected area known as a wing. Potential team members apply for a "badge" by filling out an online form. Team leaders can approve membership with the click of a button and the VRC automatically generates an account for the new team member.

The idea for the VRC was originated by NASA Headquarters in the summer of 1995. Approval to proceed with software development occurred in December the same year. Throughout 1996, a team at Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) and at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) developed the system. Early in 1997, the VRC opened its doors to support NASA projects. Since 1997, the VRC user community has grown to more than 3,300 registered users on over 175 project teams. Today, close to 12,000 files are stored in VRC team libraries. Over the past three years, the VRC development team has refined the graphical user interface (GUI) and added functions based on comments from the user community. One example of an implemented suggestion is the team directory, which is automatically populated with data from approved badge request forms.

Current development efforts include incorporating object oriented software technologies. With an object oriented architecture, the VRC will serve an environment for both Knowledge Management and Collaborative Engineering. Tools within the VRC such as a threaded discussion tool provide the capability for teams to describe experiences and thought processes. A search engine provides the capability to search through 75 different file formats for key words. As legacy codes become integrated with the system, the VRC will automatically capture metadata associated with design analysis.